

STEVE TAMAYO

ETHNIC IDENTITY

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FROM THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:26-28; 11:1-9

You have a history and belong to a family. We all do. Your ethnic identity emerges out of your history and your family. For some of us, our ethnic identities fill us with tension. Others navigate the world with little awareness of our ethnicity. Still others love our heritage. But how does God feel about ethnicity?

In this study, we'll see God's intention for humanity to "fill the earth" and "scatter." Diverse ethnic communities would inevitably form as humans lived in different places and developed their own unique histories. We are ethnic by design.

Group Discussion. In what ways are you grateful for diversity in your own life experience?

Personal Reflection. How would you describe your ethnic heritage? Try to come up with ten descriptive words.

The text features a poetic account of God's creation of humanity and his earliest blessing spoken over us. *Read Genesis 1:26-28.*

1. Ancient Hebrew poetry often used repetition to signal significance. What words, phrases, images, or ideas are repeated in this passage?

2. In what ways do you think those words or ideas have been twisted and used in ways God didn't intend them to be used?

3. What might be two or three reasons God had for giving humanity these particular commands?

4. This text takes place before the fall of humanity and the introduction of sin, brokenness, and evil into the human experience (Genesis 3). How might this fact shape our hopes and expectations of our experience of ethnic identity?

5. In what ways has your own ethnic identity felt like a blessing to you?

6. In what ways has your own ethnic identity felt like a burden to you?

Genesis 11 shows humanity's attempt to reject God's mandate for them.
Read Genesis 11:1-9.

7. In 11:1-4, we see humanity united with one language, a common speech, and a shared purpose. What do you think it would feel like to live in a community like that? What would you find difficult or appealing?

8. What reasons might the people of the city have had for building the tower?

9. In 11:6-8 God confuses their language and scatters the people. What is your initial emotional response to God's action? Why do you think this is?

10. What reasons does the text give for God's intervention?

11. What evils arise when people attempt to maintain ethnic uniformity at all costs? Try to think of two to three examples from human history or your personal experience.

12. What social and spiritual benefits might arise from having multiple ethnic communities present in the world?

13. If ethnic diversity stems from God's original mandate and has been preserved by God, we should not be surprised to find material relating to ethnicity throughout the Bible. What benefits do you think you might receive from being more attuned to what God has to say about ethnicity?



Ask God to open your ears to what he has to say about ethnicity in his Word.

NOW OR LATER

As we engage in a study of ethnicity in the Bible, we will at times have to dig a little deeper into our own presuppositions and experiences of ethnicity. The following prayer exercise offers support for this process. You might want to return to it regularly as you study.

Find a relaxing place to sit or lie down.

Take a deep breath in and hold it for a few seconds.

Breathe out and, as you exhale, pray, "Lord, I need your help . . ."



As you breathe back in, share where you need help. Use the following prompts or add your own:

- “to hear you clearly”
- “to love my family”
- “to feel like I belong”
- “to heal from my past”
- “to be open-minded”

When you’re ready to move on, close your eyes and say, “Thank you, Lord.”

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